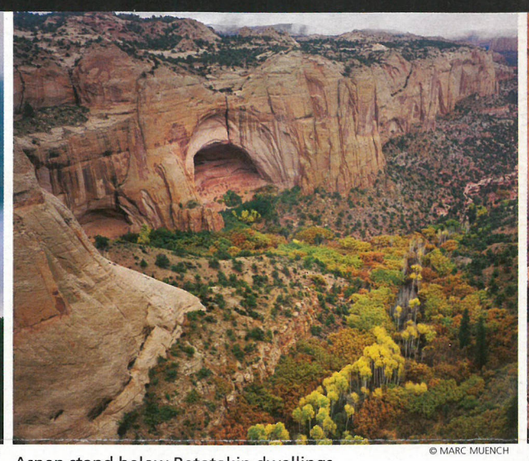
Navajo
National Monument

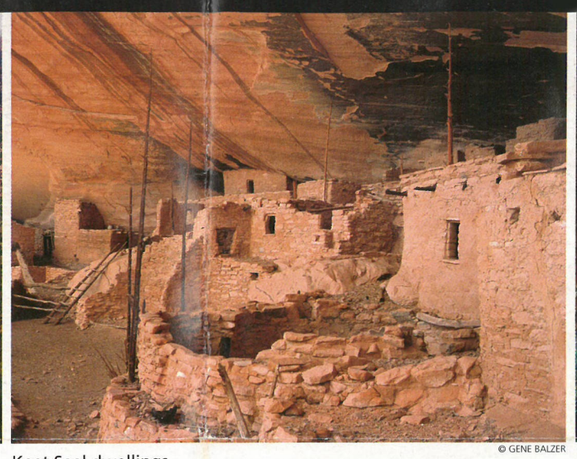
Navajo National Monument
Arizona

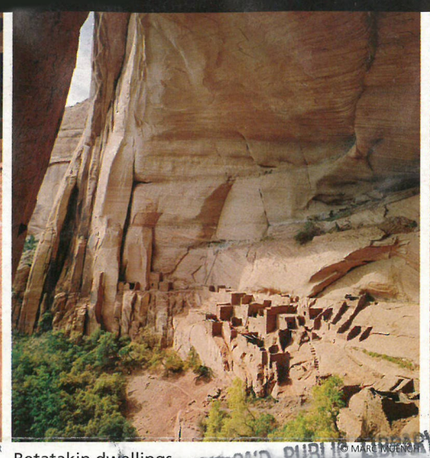
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

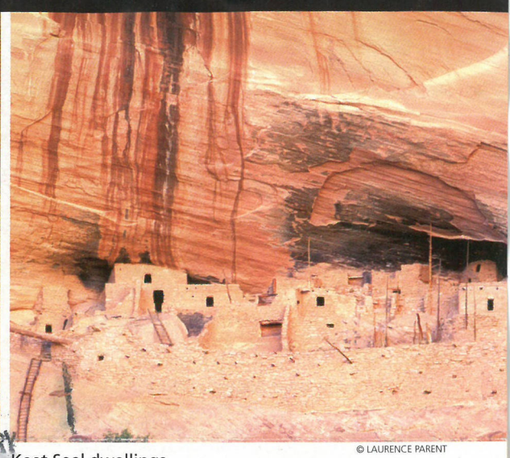
I29.21:N22b/2012

Morning mist rolls through Tsegi Canyon © RUSS GREENBURG


Aspen stand below Betatakin dwellings © MARC MUENCH


Keet Seel dwellings © GENE BALZER


Betatakin dwellings © MARC MUENCH


Keet Seel dwellings © LAURENCE PARENT

RAYMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY
2-24-12
DISCARDED ITEM

Home and Family in Canyon Country

Walk on a rainbow trail; walk on a trail of song, and all about you will be beauty. There is a way out of every dark mist, over a rainbow trail.

—Edward A. Navajo

Named for the people who now occupy the region, Navajo National Monument protects Betatakin, Keet Seel, and Inscription House—remarkably well-preserved dwellings built hundreds of years ago by Ancestral Puebloans. In the cliff faces and terraces of the Tsegi Canyon system, modern Navajo life carries on side by side with the distant past.

Nomadic hunter-gatherers came and went from this area for thousands of years. Around 2,000 years ago people became increasingly adept at farming, and a distinct culture emerged in the Four Corners region—the Ancestral Puebloans (sometimes called Anasazi). By 1200 the land surrounding today's national monument was dotted with the farms of the Ancestral Puebloan people. Their villages, clusters of masonry rooms, stood nearby. Wide-ranging trade brought items like cotton, turquoise, sea shells, and parrot feathers. Rainfall was as scarce then as now, but usually there was enough to sustain their drought-adapted crops. Even so, harder times repeatedly prompted the people to move their farms and villages. While many probably remained in the bottomlands, others took shelter in the cliffs. The three cliff dwellings at Navajo National Monument date from around 1250 to 1300. There were countless other structures on the canyon rim and floor, but these three survive protected by sandstone alcoves.

The cliff dwellers flourished here for five decades, then began to move away. There are many theories: drought, erosion, social pressures, religious dictates, or other influences that we know nothing about. Some say that the Ancestral Puebloans joined other peoples in the Southwest in regional migrations, underwent cultural shifts, and became the contemporary Hopi, Zuni, other Pueblo groups, and other tribes.

What's in a Name?

Anasazi Navajo name meaning "ancient ones" or "ancestors of the aliens." Though this name is still sometimes used, the preferred term is Ancestral Puebloans.

Ancestral Puebloan The ancient people of the Four Corners region. Besides the cliff dwellings at Navajo National Monument, they lived at Mesa Verde, Chaco Canyon, Aztec Ruins, Wupatki, Walnut Canyon, and elsewhere.

A:shiwi Zuni name for their own people.

Diné, Dineh Navajo name for their own people.

Hisatsinom Hopi name for the ancient pueblo people of the region, who they claim as ancestors.

Talastima Hopi name for Betatakin, meaning "place of the blue corn tassels."

Betatakin Navajo name meaning "ledge house."

Kawestima Hopi name for Keet Seel.

Keet Seel Rough translation of Navajo name meaning "broken pottery scattered around."

Tsu'ovi Hopi name for Inscription House, meaning "place of the rattlesnake."

Modern Navajo people are not Puebloans, but some traditional Navajo trace their ancestry back to the prehistoric cliff dwellers through clan ceremonies and oral histories. When Spanish explorers and missionaries brought horses, sheep, and goats, the Puebloans and later the Navajo became expert herders. Sheep and cattle ranching are crucial to today's way of life, and you can see livestock grazing on canyon terraces as they have for hundreds of years.

As the ancient dwellings of the Southwest were rediscovered in the late 1800s, they suffered looting and damage. The Antiquities Act of 1906, signed into law by President Theodore Roosevelt, allows U.S. Presidents to proclaim national monuments protecting natural and cultural treasures. In 1909 Navajo National Monument was established to incorporate Keet Seel, and later Betatakin and Inscription House.

Hopi

According to Hopi traditions, their ancestors—the Hisatsinom—built these cliff dwellings. The Hopi have identified pictographs on canyon walls as clan symbols. Fire, Flute, and Bighorn Sheep clans lived at Keet Seel. Betatakin was home to the Deer, Fire, Flute, and Water clans. Inscription House is a Rattlesnake, Sand, and Lizard clan village. These places are active spiritual and physical links between past, present, and future. Here various clans developed and refined rituals and ceremonies that they took to the Hopi mesas when they migrated.

Today the Hopi occupy the three fingers of Black Mesa, completely surrounded by the Navajo Nation. They have strong ties to the Ancestral Puebloans, and Hopi elders make regular pilgrimages to the old villages. Ceremonies are an integral part of daily life, and many focus on the corn crop. Artisans are known for silver jewelry, pottery, baskets, and kachinas.

Olla, Hopi potter, and seed pot

Navajo

You are on Navajo Nation land, which covers an area about the size of West Virginia. The traditional boundaries of the Navajo homeland are four sacred mountains: Blanca Peak in southern Colorado; Mount Hesperus in southwestern Colorado; Mount Taylor near Grants, New Mexico; and the San Francisco Peaks north of Flagstaff, Arizona. This has been home to the Navajo, or Diné, for centuries. As you travel through Navajo country, listen for people talking in their native language.

The Navajo first learned silversmithing from the Spanish, and have since developed distinctive jewelry styles. With the arrival of the railroads—and tourists—in the late 1800s, the Navajo made and sold a wide variety of crafts. Most prized are their sheep's wool rugs handwoven on vertical looms.

Ganado red rug, silver and turquoise pin, and Navajo weaver

San Juan Southern Paiute

By the 1850s, bands of San Juan Southern Paiutes were living along the Tsegi Canyon system (where Betatakin and Keet Seel are) and Nitsin Canyon (location of Inscription House). Today they have been granted land within the Navajo Nation—in Hidden Springs near Tuba City and a smaller parcel near Monument Valley in Utah. Strong ties remain to the canyons of Navajo National Monument.

Though they share a common heritage with Southern Paiutes of Arizona, Utah, Nevada, and California, the San Juan Southern Paiutes have a distinctive language and culture. Tribal members depend on raising livestock and subsistence farming. The tribe is also known for its hand-woven baskets using traditional techniques. Designs and materials are passed down from generation to generation. Many baskets used in traditional Navajo weddings are made by Paiute women.

Baskets and San Juan Southern Paiute weaver

Zuni

The Zuni, or A:shiwi, have lived in the Southwest for thousands of years. They consider the Tsegi Canyon region—the "northern canyons"—an integral part of their traditions. Tsegi Canyon was one of the many stops for the Zuni as they traveled through the Southwest in search of the "Middle Place." They say that several of their clans originated here and eventually migrated to Zuni Pueblo in western New Mexico where they live today. Betatakin and Inscription House are celebrated in Zuni songs, traditions, and lives. Today Zuni Pueblo is the largest of the New Mexico pueblos, with over 11,000 people. Daily life is filled with ritual and ceremony, reflecting their spiritual belief in the interconnectedness of all life. Most Zuni are involved in the creation of arts and crafts, the tribe's major industry. Besides jewelry and pottery, they are especially known for fetishes—*wema:we*—small animals carved from semi-precious stone. Fetishes signify respect for the animals represented.

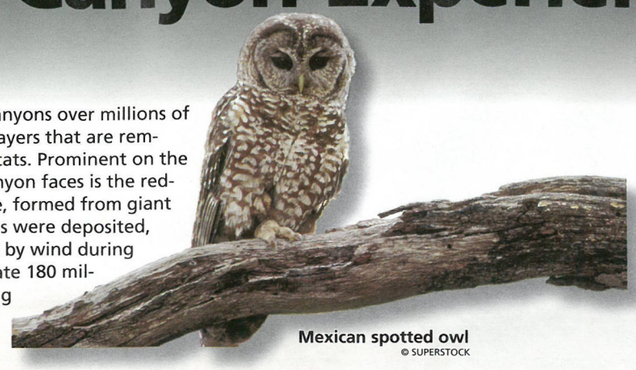
Turquoise bear fetish, olla, and Zuni woman

Betatakin dwelling

BACKGROUND: © GENE BALZER; *ABOVE:* OLLAS, SEED POT, SILVER PIN, BASKETS, BEAR FETISH—NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN; NAVAJO RUG—NPS; HISTORIC PORTRAITS BY EDWARD CURTIS—MCCORMICK LIBRARY OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

0650

Your Canyon Experience, Above and Below



Mexican spotted owl
© SUPERSTOCK

Water carved these canyons over millions of years, exposing rock layers that are remnants of ancient habitats. Prominent on the rim and the upper canyon faces is the reddish Navajo sandstone, formed from giant sand dunes. The dunes were deposited, shaped, and reshaped by wind during a near-waterless climate 180 million years ago. Seeping water dissolves the calcium carbonate that binds the sand particles. The weakened rock breaks away in horizontal slabs, forming arched alcoves where the dwellings stand.

Below the Navajo sandstone is the buff-to-purplish colored Kayenta formation—sandstone, shale, and limestone. The Kayenta was deposited by freshwater streams 190 million years ago. You can see outcroppings of the Kayenta and the 210-million-year-old Wingate sandstone layer below the Betatakin alcove and along the trail to Keet Seel. The Wingate has dinosaur tracks in places.

Just as the rock composition changes the deeper into the canyons you go, so does the plant life. Pinyon-juniper forest, well adapted to sparse rainfall, dominates the rim. Climate inside the canyon is generally warmer and wetter, good for the agriculture of ancient times and grazing lands for livestock today. Look for Gambel's oak, boxelder, and aspen. On north-facing slopes you might spot Douglas fir.

Sagebrush
© PHOTO RESEARCHERS, INC.

As you walk around, what may look to you like plain old dirt is actually alive. The ground is covered with biological soil crust, a community of cyanobacteria (blue-green algae), green algae, lichens, mosses, microfungi, bacteria, and byproducts of all these organisms. The crust helps prevent soil erosion and retain water. Even a single footprint can damage it, and it takes dozens of years to self-repair. Don't bust the crust—stay on trails!

Trails

Whether your hike is long or short, be prepared. Wear appropriate shoes or boots, use sun protection, and carry and drink plenty of water. Do not drink groundwater. Hiking can be more strenuous than you think, especially if you are not used to high elevation. If you have heart or respiratory problems, do not attempt the canyon hikes. Most important, stay on trails. Though it may not look it, the desert world is fragile. Human carelessness can do irreparable damage.

Please help us preserve the cliff dwellings by not disturbing them, removing anything, or entering them without a ranger. The dwellings have survived several hundred years; please leave them in good condition for present and future generations.

Sandal Trail If you have only a brief time at the park, this is a good way to see the dwellings. A paved trail from the visitor center leads to an overlook with a spectacular cross-canyon view of the ancient village of Betatakin framed in its sandstone arch. 1.3 miles round-trip, self-guiding.

Aspen Trail This trail branches off the Sandal Trail and descends 300 feet to view a relic forest of aspen, habitat for the endangered Mexican spotted owl. This is a steep trail via stairs and dirt surface. 0.8 mile round-trip; self-guiding.

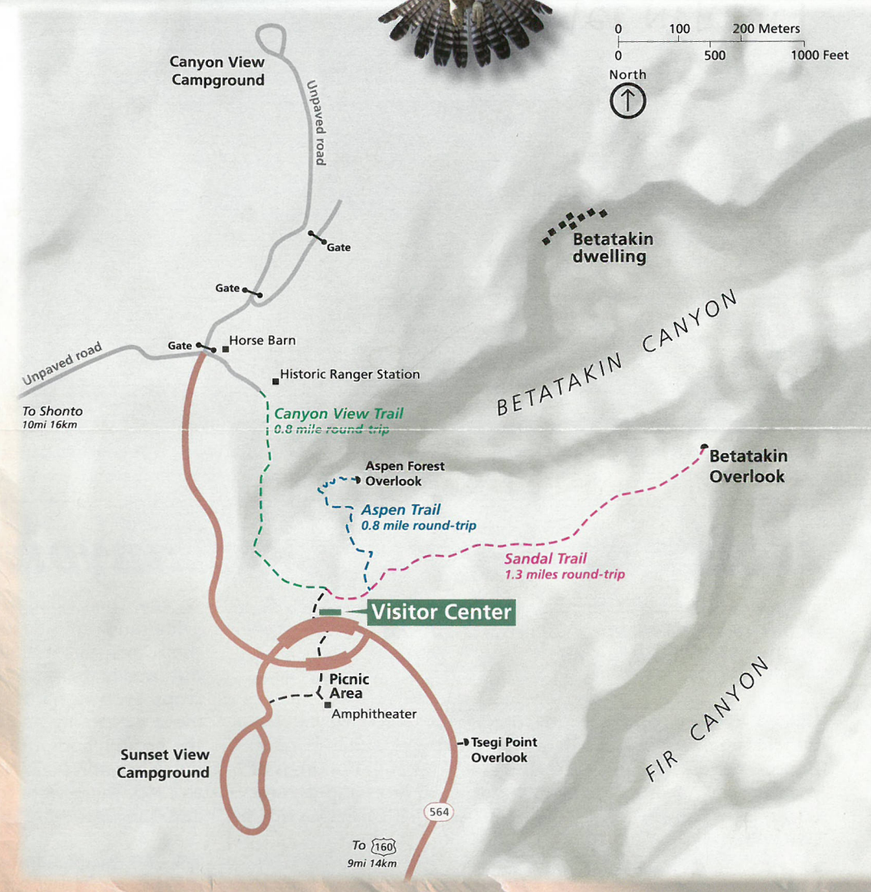
Canyon View Trail This trail leads to a view from the head of Betatakin Canyon and continues to the historic ranger station. 0.8 mile round-trip, self-guiding.

Betatakin/Talastima You must visit this site on a ranger-guided tour. This fairly strenuous five-mile round-trip hike takes three to five hours. The elevation on the rim is 7,300 feet, and there is a 700-foot gradual descent. Advance reservations are highly recommended, especially on weekends and in summer. Call the park staff for information and reservations.

Keet Seel/Kawestima This strenuous, 17-mile round-trip hike takes you to one of the best-preserved cliff dwellings in the Southwest. The trail drops 1,000 feet to the canyon floor, then follows shallow streams to the dwelling. At times you will be hiking through water, so plan accordingly. Once at Keet Seel, you must wait for the ranger on duty to lead a tour of the dwellings.

Hikers must get a permit and orientation information at the visitor center. The daily limit is 20 people, so advance reservations are highly recommended; call the park staff for information. You don't want to rush through this experience; most hikers choose to stay overnight at the primitive Keet Seel campground. *The campground and portions of the trail are outside the park boundary on Navajo Nation land, often indicated by sheep camps, corrals, and fences. Please respect the privacy of canyon residents.*

Peregrine falcon
© KENT R. KELLER



Villages in Sandstone

Keet Seel, one of the best preserved dwellings in the Southwest © TOM BEAN

Inscription House (closed to public) © MARC MUENCH

Room interior at Keet Seel © GENE BALZER

Rock image at Betatakin © TOM BEAN

Keet Seel dwelling nestled in sandstone alcove © LAURENCE PARENT

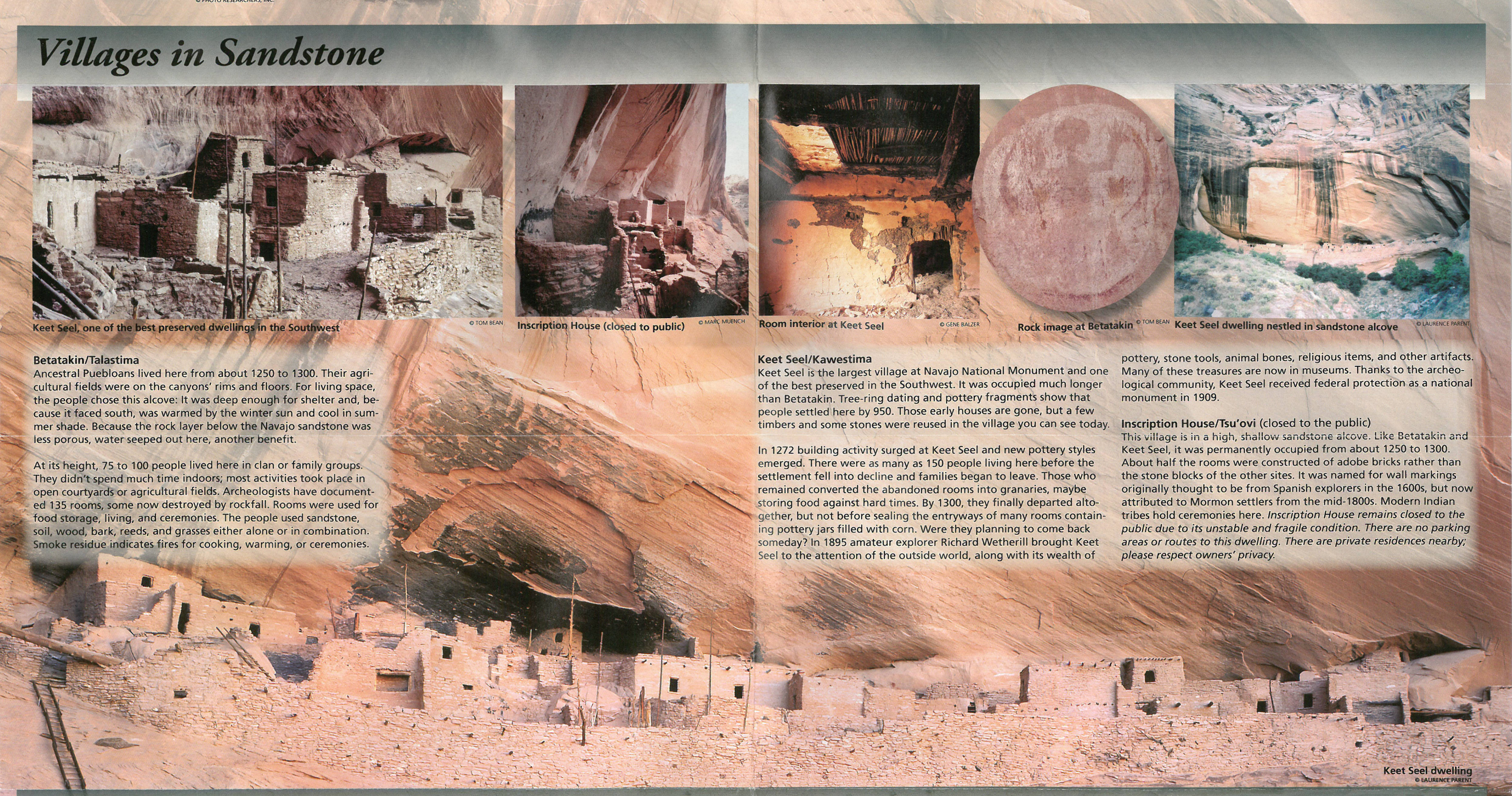
Betatakin/Talastima
Ancestral Puebloans lived here from about 1250 to 1300. Their agricultural fields were on the canyons' rims and floors. For living space, the people chose this alcove: It was deep enough for shelter and, because it faced south, was warmed by the winter sun and cool in summer shade. Because the rock layer below the Navajo sandstone was less porous, water seeped out here, another benefit.

At its height, 75 to 100 people lived here in clan or family groups. They didn't spend much time indoors; most activities took place in open courtyards or agricultural fields. Archeologists have documented 135 rooms, some now destroyed by rockfall. Rooms were used for food storage, living, and ceremonies. The people used sandstone, soil, wood, bark, reeds, and grasses either alone or in combination. Smoke residue indicates fires for cooking, warming, or ceremonies.

Keet Seel/Kawestima
Keet Seel is the largest village at Navajo National Monument and one of the best preserved in the Southwest. It was occupied much longer than Betatakin. Tree-ring dating and pottery fragments show that people settled here by 950. Those early houses are gone, but a few timbers and some stones were reused in the village you can see today.

In 1272 building activity surged at Keet Seel and new pottery styles emerged. There were as many as 150 people living here before the settlement fell into decline and families began to leave. Those who remained converted the abandoned rooms into granaries, maybe storing food against hard times. By 1300, they finally departed altogether, but not before sealing the entryways of many rooms containing pottery jars filled with corn. Were they planning to come back someday? In 1895 amateur explorer Richard Wetherill brought Keet Seel to the attention of the outside world, along with its wealth of pottery, stone tools, animal bones, religious items, and other artifacts. Many of these treasures are now in museums. Thanks to the archeological community, Keet Seel received federal protection as a national monument in 1909.

Inscription House/Tsu'ovi (closed to the public)
This village is in a high, shallow sandstone alcove. Like Betatakin and Keet Seel, it was permanently occupied from about 1250 to 1300. About half the rooms were constructed of adobe bricks rather than the stone blocks of the other sites. It was named for wall markings originally thought to be from Spanish explorers in the 1600s, but now attributed to Mormon settlers from the mid-1800s. Modern Indian tribes hold ceremonies here. *Inscription House remains closed to the public due to its unstable and fragile condition. There are no parking areas or routes to this dwelling. There are private residences nearby; please respect owners' privacy.*



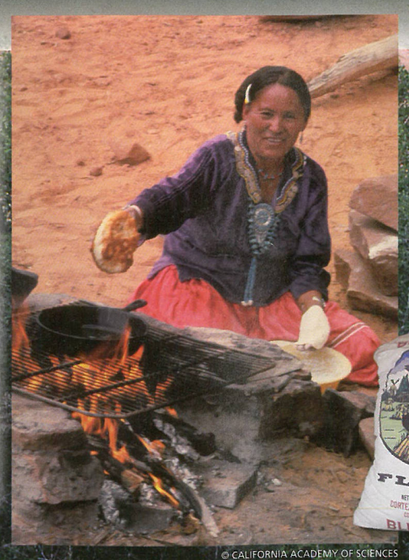
Keet Seel dwelling
© LAURENCE PARENT

Plan Your Visit

Navajo National Monument is off US 160, about 50 miles northeast of Tuba City and 20 miles southwest of Kayenta. From US 160, take AZ 564 nine miles.

The visitor center has information, exhibits, videos, and sales items. Navajo Arts and Crafts Enterprise has a gift shop specializing in Navajo silverwork. Service animals are welcome in the park.

Two campgrounds and a picnic area are available first-come, first-served. Group campsites are also available. Sunset View campground has charcoal grills, but wood fires are not allowed. The nearest food and fuel are at Black Mesa Trading Post at the junction of Ariz. 564 and US 160. Pets must be leashed at all times. They are not allowed in buildings or on trails.



© CALIFORNIA ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

NPS

Navajo culture mixes old and new. Clothing and jewelry, though not from ancient times, are distinctive. Navajo fry bread, made from wheat flour and water, is a staple food—try it!

For Your Safety
This is a natural area with canyons, cliffs, falling rocks, flash-floods, lightning, and other hazards. Be alert and safety conscious at all times. Rocks can fall at any time in the alcoves and canyons. Visitors on tours enter the alcoves at their own risk. • For firearms information, check the park website or ask at the visitor center.

Protect Natural and Cultural Resources
All natural and cultural objects are protected by federal law, with substantial fines for violation.

Time Difference
The Navajo Nation observes Mountain Daylight Time (MDT), while the rest of Arizona does not. So from mid-March to early November, Navajo National Monument is an hour ahead of Grand Canyon, Flagstaff, and other Arizona locations.

More Information
Navajo National Monument is one of over 390 areas in the National Park System. For more information about national parks, visit www.nps.gov.

Navajo National Monument
HC 71, Box 3
Tonalea, AZ 86044
928-672-2700
www.nps.gov/nava

GPO:2011—365-615/80788
Printed on recycled paper.